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UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY

(Not an official record or press release. This summary is made available to NGO representatives for their information and free dissemination).

On 8 February 1990, Mr. S. Chidambaranathan, Director of the United Nations University's Office in North America, briefed NGO representatives on aspects of the United Nations University (UNU).

Mr. Chidambaranathan cited the numerous global challenges confronting our world today. What was happening in Eastern Europe and issues concerning the environment, science, and global economy are among the many rapidly changing challenges in the world arena. It is in this context that Mr. Chidambaranathan wished to commence his speech on the United Nations University.

Mr. Chidambaranathan first explained to the audience the unique characteristics of the United Nations University. The University is an international community of scholars with autonomy in the United Nations system. They are brought together in the global networks of the University. Like traditional universities it is concerned with the creation and transfer of knowledge and a critique of that knowledge. While scholars are associated with its work, the UNU neither has faculty nor students. However, a limited number of students at the post-graduate or doctoral levels have opportunities for involvement in the work of the University. A key function of the University is to strengthen institutional and scholarly capabilities around the world and particularly in the developing countries.

The United Nations University is an academic arm of the United Nations established by the General Assembly in 1972. Its sponsors are the United Nations and UNESCO. The University consists of a Council (its governing body), the Rector, the University Centre and a decentralized network of research training centres and programmes and other co-operating institutions and scholars. The Council consists of 24 individuals from 24 separate countries. These individuals are appointed jointly by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Director-General of UNESCO. Individuals serve a six-year term and half are rotated every three years. In addition to the Rector, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Director-General of UNESCO, the Executive Director of UNITAR and the Director of UNU serve as ex-officio members of the council.

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The central programming and co-ordinating centre for the University is located in Tokyo. This base provides the necessary overall leadership in identifying pertinent issues for research and training around the world. The Centre is rather small, employing an estimated eighty-five persons. The reason for this, states Mr. Chidambaranathan, is simply because the University prefers to carry out its work in a decentralized way in different countries that would most benefit from the reseach and training.

The work of the United Nations University is carried out through research, training and dissemination. Before deciding on an area for research, it is reviewed by advisory or planning groups to determine what role, if any, UNU had and the availability of resources. Research areas include: governance and conflict resolution, development economics, natural resources, energy, science and technology, population and environment.

The training instrument is closely associated to research and is primarily meant for strengthening institutional capabilities. The training helps provide knowledge updates in dealing with specific issues and also enhances decison-making capabilities.

The dissemination function which is also related to research is implemented through academic publications, audio-visual materials, public information, journals and databases.

Mr. Chidambaranathan pointed out one particular accomplishment accredited to the University's World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER). This institute, located in Helsinki, is responsible, among others, for policy oriented research done on the recycling of the Japanese surplus for the benefit of third world nations and research on third world debt reductions in general.

The United Nations University does not receive any subvention from the United Nations regular budget. Instead its basic income is derived from an endowment fund toward which member states make voluntary contributions. Its first donation, $100 million, came from the host country, Japan. Since then, 45 other Member States have pledged or contributed a combined amount of approximately $110 million.

Lastly, the agenda for the 1990s is composed of five broad themes: (1) Universal human values and global responsibilities, (2) New directions for the global economy, (3) Sustaining global life support systems, (4) Science and Technology and (5) Population dynamics and human welfare. With this agenda the United Nations University hopes to augment knowledge and research in the new decade.

In this context, the University continues to encourage collaboration among institutions, scholars, and NGOs. Specifically for NGOs, Mr. Chidambaranathan pointed out that professional and scientific organizations have contributed quite extensively to research projects conducted by the University especially at regional and international levels.